

Université Lumière - Lyon 2

Mémoire de synthèse en vue de l'Habilitation à diriger des recherches

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**Analyse de systèmes prosodiques d'Asie orientale :  
linguistique de terrain et phonétique expérimentale**

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*Résumé en français (2 pages)*

*& English summary (5 pages)*

## RESUME EN FRANÇAIS (2 PAGES)

Comme il est d'usage, le présent dossier soumis en vue de l'Habilitation à Diriger les Recherches présente les travaux réalisés depuis le doctorat (2006-2016) et esquisse des orientations futures pour mes recherches et pour l'encadrement de jeunes chercheurs. La synthèse des travaux réalisés est organisée selon cinq axes : linguistique de terrain, phonétique expérimentale et phonologie théorique, prosodie, phonétique historique, et enfin méthodologie. Dix publications sont jointes au dossier. Parmi celles-ci, la principale est une monographie (sous presse) au sujet du système tonal d'une langue sino-tibétaine :

*Tone in Yongning Na: lexical tones and morphotonology.* (Studies in Diversity Linguistics 13). Berlin: Language Science Press (2017)

Cet ouvrage se veut une application des méthodes classiques de la linguistique dite « de terrain » (§1.1), lesquelles coïncident avec mon objectif d'une compréhension des phénomènes linguistiques en système et en contexte. Le livre fait partie d'un ensemble qui comporte également un dictionnaire en ligne et un ensemble de récits transcrits, traduits et annotés (mis à libre disposition sur internet dans la Collection Pangloss, archive numérique de « langues rares »). Un deuxième document joint au dossier se rattache également au volet « linguistique de terrain » :

Tonal reassociation and rising tonal contours in Naxi. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 29(1). 61–94 (2006)

Dans le domaine de la phonétique expérimentale (§1.2), mon rôle de « phonéticien de terrain », tel que je le conçois, consiste à réaliser un gros plan expérimental sur tel ou tel point précis identifié au fil de l'étude d'un système phonologique : « chaînon manquant » dans l'évolution diachronique, ou phénomène contrevenant aux généralisations typologiques qui paraissent les mieux établies. Deux exemples sont joints au dossier : l'un concerne la réduction syllabique en naxi, et l'autre le système tonal de la langue tamang.

Michaud, Alexis & Xueguang He. 2007. Reassociated tones and coalescent syllables in Naxi (Tibeto-Burman). *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 37(3). 237–255.

Mazaudon, Martine & Alexis Michaud. 2008. Tonal contrasts and initial consonants: a case study of Tamang, a “missing link” in tonogenesis. *Phonetica* 65(4). 231–256.

Sur la base de telles études de cas sont proposées certaines réflexions générales concernant la prosodie (§1.3).

La linguistique historique (§1.4) est d’une importance capitale pour la bonne compréhension des faits linguistiques. Peu expérimenté dans ce domaine, je préfère m’y aventurer en bonne compagnie, en faisant équipe avec des spécialistes : j’apporte essentiellement ma connaissance des langues que je décris, et les données synchroniques que j’ai recueillies – où l’on retrouve le *leitmotiv* des enquêtes de terrain comme fondement de tous mes travaux. Trois des quatre publications du dossier relatives à ce thème sont des co-publications entreprises à l’initiative de diachroniciens (Guillaume Jacques et Michel Ferlus).

Jacques, Guillaume & Alexis Michaud. 2011. Approaching the historical phonology of three highly eroded Sino-Tibetan languages: Naxi, Na and Laze. *Diachronica* 28(4). 468–498.

Michaud, Alexis. 2011. The tones of numerals and numeral-plus-classifier phrases: on structural similarities between Naxi, Na and Laze. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 34(1). 1–26.

Michaud, Alexis, Guillaume Jacques & Robert L. Rankin. 2012. Historical transfer of nasality between consonantal onset and vowel: from C to V or from V to C? *Diachronica* 29(2). 201–230.

Michaud, Alexis, Michel Ferlus & Minh-Châu Nguyễn. 2015. Strata of standardization: the Phong Nha dialect of Vietnamese (Quảng Bình Province) in historical perspective. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 38(1). 124–162.

Le volet *Méthodologie* (§1.5) regroupe des réflexions concernant diverses étapes, de la collecte à l’archivage des données linguistiques, développant des idées dont la plupart sont déjà exposées dans deux publications qui figurent au présent dossier :

Michailovsky, Boyd, Martine Mazaudon, Alexis Michaud, Séverine Guillaume, Alexandre François & Evangelia Adamou. 2014. Documenting and researching endangered languages: the Pangloss Collection. *Language Documentation and Conservation* 8. 119–135.

Niebuhr, Oliver & Alexis Michaud. 2015. Speech data acquisition: the underestimated challenge. *KALIPHO - Kieler Arbeiten zur Linguistik und Phonetik* 3. 1–42.

S’agissant des orientations futures, l’accent est mis sur les deux groupes de langues qui constituent désormais ma spécialité : les langues naish (famille sino-tibétaine), d’une part, et les langues vietiques (famille austroasiatique), d’autre part. Les orientations futures pour la recherche et l’encadrement de travaux de recherche sont présentées en perspective aréale, puis de façon thématique.

MOTS CLES : linguistique de terrain – phonétique expérimentale – documentation linguistique – langues naish (famille sino-tibétaine) – langues vietiques (famille austroasiatique)

## ENGLISH SUMMARY (5 PAGES)

In the present-day French university system, *Habilitation à Diriger les Recherches* (meaning “accreditation to supervise research”) is a post-doctoral qualification conferred for a thesis accompanied by selected publications, and defended in a process similar to that of a doctoral dissertation. Accordingly, my application for *Habilitation* comprises (i) ten publications and (ii) a memoir, entitled “Analyzing prosodic systems in East Asia: linguistic fieldwork and experimental phonetics”, which presents my research since completion of my Ph. D. (2005) and sketches out perspectives for future work and for the supervision of younger scholars’ research.

The ten publications selected for the present application for *Habilitation* are all written in English; on the other hand, the *Habilitation* thesis is written in French (a language in which I was almost monolingual until I entered higher education). A five-page English summary of the thesis is mandatory. This was not easy to produce, partly because the thesis itself is, in a sense, a summary (a progress report, not a “standalone” scientific publication like a Ph. D. dissertation or a book), and secondly because I wrote the thesis – availing myself of the ease of expression that I enjoy in my native language – as a *narrative* about my work, in a style which is unlike that of my English-language papers. I was taught by my Ph. D. supervisor that articles in phonetics should be written with non-native readers in mind, and that I must learn to report plain facts plainly. “Go ahead and write novels if you feel like it, but don’t mix genres!” (Jacqueline Vaissière, M.A. seminar, c. 1997-1998). When I sat down to write the *Habilitation* thesis, I was tempted to switch styles at the same time as I was switching languages. I apologize for the more than usually awkward and stilted writing of this English summary of the rather convoluted French text.

The bulk of the thesis (pp. 14-59) deals with the work conducted from 2006 to 2016 (§1: “Travaux réalisés”). A second part (§2: “Orientations futures”) presents future prospects. The first part is organized by topic, successively presenting (i) linguistic fieldwork, (ii) experimental phonetics and theoretical phonology, (iii) prosody, (iv) historical phonology, and (v) issues of method. Those of the ten accompanying publications that are most relevant to a given topic are mentioned at the outset of the corresponding section.

Since I joined the LACITO research centre at CNRS in 2006, I have been able to focus mainly on “field linguistics”, aiming at an in-depth understanding of linguistic phenomena (i) as part of a *linguistic system* and (ii) in their social and cultural context. Two of the accompanying publications are particularly relevant to this aspect:

- a journal article: Tonal reassociation and rising tonal contours in Naxi. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 29(1). 61–94 (2006)
- a book to appear in the Spring of 2017: *Tone in Yongning Na: lexical tones and morphotonology*. (Studies in Diversity Linguistics 13). Berlin: Language Science Press (2017)

The volume about tone in Yongning Na is the main piece of the present application for *Habilitation*. It is a monograph about the tone system of Yongning Na, a Sino-Tibetan language which by available estimates has 47 000 speakers. This language has high cross-dialect diversity in terms of tone: some dialects have systems based on two tonal levels (High and Low), whereas the one that I study (referred to as the Alawa dialect) has three: High, Mid and Low. A reference grammar of a neighbouring dialect (Shuiluo) is available, written by Liberty Lidz, an American colleague (Ph. D. Austin, Texas), hence my choice to focus essentially on tone, an aspect which is not central to L. Lidz’s work. The monograph is part of a “trilogy” that also includes a dictionary (available online since 2015, as a .pdf document, in database format, and also in .html format) and a set of transcribed, translated, annotated and time-aligned narratives. The three parts of the “trilogy” have been available online since the earliest stages of their preparation. The recordings and accompanying transcriptions have been made available online since 2011. Draft versions of the monograph have been online since 2014, and the final version will also be *open-access*, like all books published at Language Science Press.

In the field of experimental phonetics (§1.2), I see my role as a “field phonetician” as consisting in *zooming in* with experimental tools on a topic of special interest, identified in the course of the study of a phonological system. This topic can be a “missing link” of diachronic evolution (a synchronic state which is known, from the literature about its diachronic evolution, to be especially transient and short-lived), or a phenomenon that contradicts typological views that previously seemed well-established (or simply tended to be taken for granted). Two case studies are included in the set of selected publications. One concerns syllable reduction in Naxi, and raises the issue of the extent to which the notion of “floating tone” sheds light on the facts of this language: this notion, which appears applicable to the reduction of syllables carrying High tone, highlights the asymmetry between the reduction of High-tone syllables on the one hand, Mid- and Low-tone syllables on the other. The second case study concerns the tone system of the Tamang language.

Michaud, Alexis & Xueguang He. 2007. Reassociated tones and coalescent syllables in Naxi (Tibeto-Burman). *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 37(3). 237–255.

Mazaudon, Martine & Alexis Michaud. 2008. Tonal contrasts and initial consonants: a case study of Tamang, a “missing link” in tonogenesis. *Phonetica* 65(4). 231–256.

Experience gained through case studies allow for some generalizations about prosody, defined here as consisting of (i) lexically distinctive properties: stress, as in English; tone, as in Mandarin, Yorùbá or Na; tonal accent, as in Japanese and Swedish; phonation-type register, as in Mon (Mon-Khmer family); (ii) intonation; and (iii) performance factors, including rhythm (§1.3). To make a long story short, I find it hard to reconcile my observations with “autosegmental-metrical” models which are currently taught as the standard in intonation studies at many Universities, and which many colleagues adopt either because it is “standard” – which can be seen as a lack of interest in working out for oneself which of the existing models and approaches is most suitable for the facts under consideration – or out of a personal attraction to this model’s theoretical audaciousness, which I see as a hallmark of dilettantism. Methods should not be an issue of personal preferences. Be that as it may, I am not tempted to fritter away my research time crossing theoretical swords with prosodists who see the world differently. In terms of my career as a researcher, the perceived discrepancy between my aims, methods and concerns and those of colleagues working within the framework of “intonational phonology” had the positive effect of encouraging me to diversify my work and explore other avenues, such as historical linguistics.

To coin a phrase, diachrony is essential to understanding linguistic facts. As I have little experience of this domain, I enter it accompanied by specialists; three of the four publications relative to this strand of research (§1.4) were written at the initiative of diachronicians (Guillaume Jacques and Michel Ferlus). In joint work with colleagues, my main contribution consists in providing and explaining fresh fieldwork data – which points, once more, to a *leitmotiv* of the thesis: fieldwork as the basis of my research.

Jacques, Guillaume & Alexis Michaud. 2011. Approaching the historical phonology of three highly eroded Sino-Tibetan languages: Naxi, Na and Laze. *Diachronica* 28(4). 468–498.

Michaud, Alexis. 2011. The tones of numerals and numeral-plus-classifier phrases: on structural similarities between Naxi, Na and Laze. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 34(1). 1–26.

Michaud, Alexis, Guillaume Jacques & Robert L. Rankin. 2012. Historical transfer of nasality between consonantal onset and vowel: from C to V or from V to C? *Diachronica* 29(2). 201–230.

Michaud, Alexis, Michel Ferlus & Minh-Châu Nguyễn. 2015. Strata of standardization: the Phong Nha dialect of Vietnamese (Quảng Bình Province) in historical perspective. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 38(1). 124–162.

The last section about my work so far is devoted to *methodology* (§1.5). It contains reflections about several stages in linguistic research, from data collection to archiving. Among publications in this domain to which I participated, two are part of the selection made for the present *Habilitation* application. One, coauthored with Oliver Niebuhr (a specialist of prosody), points out that speech data acquisition is an underestimated challenge, and provides some advice and suggestions. The other concerns the Pangloss Collection, the language archive developed at the LACITO research centre.

Michailovsky, Boyd, Martine Mazaudon, Alexis Michaud, Séverine Guillaume, Alexandre François & Evangelia Adamou. 2014. Documenting and researching endangered languages: the Pangloss Collection. *Language Documentation and Conservation* 8. 119–135.

Niebuhr, Oliver & Alexis Michaud. 2015. Speech data acquisition: the underestimated challenge. *KALIPHO - Kieler Arbeiten zur Linguistik und Phonetik* 3. 1–42.

As for the second part of the thesis, which sets out orientations for future work and for student supervision, emphasis is placed on the two language groups which constitute my field of specialization: (i) the Naish subgroup within Sino-Tibetan, comprising Naxi, Na, Laze and their dialects, and (ii) the Vietic subgroup within Austroasiatic. Both of these language groups comprise several less-documented (or virtually undocumented) varieties each of which requires a full-fledged study; this makes it indispensable to team up with others (colleagues and students). At present (2017), the circle of researchers who focus on these languages is really small. I would like to contribute to these two fields by supervising students and conducting joint projects with colleagues. For an adequate dialect coverage of Naish languages, I think that the following villages would call for a book-length description: Fengke 奉科 and Labai 拉柏, on the banks of the Yangtze river ; Wujiao 屋脚 ; and Xiangjiao 项脚, in Muli county. An anthropologist who does fieldwork in the Na area, Pascale-Marie Milan, reports that language shift to Mandarin is slower in remote locations such as Wujiao 屋脚. Practical difficulties of this fieldwork location, such as the absence of power grid and the rougher climate as compared with the Yongning plain, initially deterred me from choosing this fieldwork location, but remote locations become less uncomfortable over the years, and Wujiao or Xiangjiao appear as suitable destinations for students wishing to conduct immersion fieldwork. For less intrepid candidates, places such as Fengke are easier options. Among Vietic languages, most would likewise warrant in-depth description; efforts will be coordinated with colleagues (Mark Alves, Marc Brunelle, James Kirby...).

As a complement to this areal perspective, the final section of the thesis (§2.2) sets out some future plans for the publication and exploitation of the results of linguistic analysis. The idea is to

put together a complete set of linked electronic resources comprising grammars, dictionaries, text corpora, and multimedia documents. One-click links from texts to dictionaries and back, and from grammars to both texts and dictionaries, are not yet available; I would like to contribute to the setting up of stable architectures that will allow for easier navigation between data and analyses, creating hopes of progress in terms of depth and precision in research.

Standing back to look at my “research course” so far, an issue is the diversity of approaches: I try to make contributions to several disciplines that differ markedly from one another, especially linguistic fieldwork, phonetics/phonology, and historical linguistics. To state that my research is at the *intersection* of these fields may be inappropriate, as it is not altogether clear that they really intersect to any great extent: in fact, they are distinct in various respects, each requiring the acquisition of specific knowledge and experience, to the extent that they are sometimes felt to be mutually exclusive. The “centripetal” forces at play inside each subfield are noticeable in the training of students: some students reach the stage of a Ph. D. in Linguistics without receiving training in historical linguistics, and with no experience of the fundamental task of working out a language’s phonological system on the basis of first-hand elicitation. Given this situation, I should perhaps clarify that I make no attempt at hybridization across disciplines. In the same way as I try to use several languages without mixing them (which requires constant effort to prevent blending), I try my best to avoid confusion between genres in my research. Each field has its methods, its strengths and its own logic. My work could perhaps be called *multidisciplinary*, rather than truly interdisciplinary. I have no plans to use interdisciplinarity as an excuse for second-rate research, asking colleagues to make allowances for my special status as no more than a “semi-insider”. A piece of research in experimental phonetics is to be judged by the standards of this discipline, and must stand the test of specialists’ criticism; different but similarly stringent evaluation criteria apply to grammatical descriptions and diachronic analyses. Each of my publications should stand on its own, without requiring contextual information about the author. I am aware of the many gaps in my knowledge of each of my fields of specialization: to name only some of the more blatant shortcomings, I work on languages of the Tibeto-Burman area without knowing either Tibetan or Burmese, and on languages of the Mon-Khmer group without knowing either Mon or Khmer; and in the field of experimental phonetics, I have not kept up with new trends in statistics in the last ten years. In view of this situation, I try to remain vigilant: when advising students, as in my own research, I take care to complement my knowledge with the help of colleagues.



KEYWORDS : linguistic fieldwork – experimental phonetics – language documentation – Naish languages (Sino-Tibetan) – Vietic languages (Austroasiatic)